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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: RUSSIAN MILITARY BASE WITHDRAWAL FROM GEORGIA
RESUMES

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Russia appears ready to complete its withdrawal from its military base in Akhalkalaki and to finish removing all heavy equipment from its base in Batumi in 2007. On April 13, the first of five convoys of Russian arms and equipment left the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki for the Russian 102nd military base in Gyumri, Armenia. According to George Zakarashvili, Director of the Russia Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Russians are withdrawing their personnel and equipment ahead of schedule, and are on target to close the Akhalkalaki base by July 1, 2007. Withdrawal of 13 trainloads of heavy equipment from Batumi to Russia is scheduled to begin in mid-May and be completed by August 23, 2007. Final withdrawal of the remaining personnel and equipment from Batumi will happen in 2008. The status of the remaining Russian base at Gudauta, in the breakaway province of Abkhazia, remains unclear, and Zakarashvili said that negotiations between Russia and Georgia on the issue have broken off since last year. End Summary.

Russia ahead of schedule

12. (C) Zakarashvili told Poloff on April 26 that Russia was ahead of schedule in its base withdrawal activities. Akhalkalaki will be closed by July 1, he said, which is far ahead of the stated deadline of October 1. Three vehicle convoys of equipment have already left Akhalkalaki and two remain. He also said that the withdrawal of heavy equipment from Batumi will be complete by August 23, which is also ahead of schedule. He said that the one positive outcome from the recent tensions between Georgia and Russia has been the Russian acceleration of the base withdrawal process.

Gudauta status still unresolved

13. (C) Zakarashvili said that the GoG does not consider the Russian base at Gudauta to be closed, contrary to Russian assertions, and wants to have regular, unannounced international monitoring trips to the base. He said the GoG was confident that the base at Gudauta was an active military base and not a CIS peacekeeping base, and would like an international monitoring team to confirm this. Negotiations with Russia over the status of the base broke off last year, he said, and have not resumed. When asked if he thought the Gudauta issue could be resolved independently of a political solution to Abkhazia, he replied that the closure of Gudauta was a Russian obligation under the 1999 Istanbul Commitments and thus was a separate issue.

Comment

14. (C) Russia appears on track to deliver on its commitment to fully withdraw from its base in Akhalkalaki by the end of

2007 and from its base in Batumi by 2008, however the Russian base at Gudauta remains an issue. It is unclear at this time whether recent comments by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov on Russia's possible withdrawal from the Conventional Forces Europe (CFE) treaty will affect future withdrawals of Russian equipment and personnel from its bases in Georgia. Except for Gudauta, there remains little left to remove.

TEFFT